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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the number of traditional preservice teachers (18- to 21-year-old age range) has decreased, while the number of older, nontraditional students has increased. At the time of student teaching, nontraditional students seem to have more problems than do more traditional students. This study developed and field tested an instrument, the "Perceptions for Student Teaching Instrument" (PSTI), designed to ascertain students' feelings of preparedness for student teaching and to compare the attitudes of various types of students. Seven public and three private institutions in Tennessee participated in the study by administering the PSTI to all student teachers at the beginning of their spring semester (1990). The results of the study, based on 629 returned and usable surveys, indicated that, although the instrument did not detect differences between groups of students, it added another dimension to the evaluation of teacher education programs. Tables provide information on subjects by category; percent response, mean, and standard deviation for each statement on the PSTI; and means, standard deviations, and t-test for total score for traditional and nontraditional students, for males and females, and for public and private institutions. (JD)

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PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS FOR STUDENT TEACHING[1]

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Student teaching is the culminating experience for most teacher education programs. Therefore, it is the logical setting for preservice teachers to demonstrate their teaching skills (Barnes, 1983) and to gather information about their feelings of how well the programs prepared them to enter the classroom. Information gathered in this manner can be useful for improving the teacher education program and provides another avenue for collecting formative evaluation data.

Individuals approach student teaching with a variety of emotions, many of which conflict with each other. These emotions may adversely affect the individual's feelings of preparedness for student teaching. In turn how well an individual has been prepared to assume the role of teacher will have an effect on performance in student teaching. Therefore, it is important to determine how well the prospective teacher feels toward the teacher education program that has just been completed.

In recent years, the number of traditional preservice teachers (i.e., those in the 18 to 21 year old age range) has decreased, while the number of older, nontraditional students, has increased. The nontraditional student enters a teacher education program with different interest and attitudes (Cohen, 1982, 1983; deVoss, 1979). At the time of student teaching nontraditional students seem to have more problems than do more traditional students. Because of increasing numbers of nontraditional students, it is important to determine, if there are differences in nontraditional and traditional students perceptions of how well their teacher education program prepared them to enter the classroom (Iovacchini, Hall, & Hengstler, 1985).

Objective

The major objective of this study was to develop and field test an instrument designed to ascertain students feelings of preparedness for student teaching. More specific purposes of the study included to:

1. develop an instrument useful in determining attitudes of student teachers toward the teacher education program they have completed,
2. determine the validity and reliability of the instrument, and
3. compare the attiudes of various types of students toward their teacher education program.

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Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were utilized to help guide the data collection phase of the study. Each hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance.

1. There was no significant difference in the perceptions of preparedness for student teaching among traditional and nontraditional preservice teachers.

2. There was no significant difference in the perceptions of preparedness for student teaching among preservice males and females.

3. There was no significant difference between the perception of preparedness for student teaching among students enrolled in public and private institutions of higher education.

Methodology

The procedures for this study were divided into two distinct phases--instrument development and data collection. Following is a summary of these activities.

Instrument Development

The **Perceptions for Student Teaching Instrument** (PSTI) was developed and and validated specifically for use in this study. The literature related to attitudes toward teacher education programs and student teaching was reviewed to locate possible questions for inclusion on the instrument. Initially 40 statements (questions) were located that appeared to be appropriate for inclusion on the instrument. Each of these statements was designed to determine how a preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness for student teaching based on the program of study they had just completed. After careful analysis the number was reduced to 21. The items were designed such that individuals could respond on a five-point Likert rating scale with 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, and 5=strongly disagree. In addition, four demographic items were made a part of the instrument and included: age, gender, martial status, and primary area of teaching specialization.

The face validity of the instrument was determined through an evaluation of all items by a six member faculty panel at Tennessee Technological University, that was familiar with the teacher education program of the institution and with student teaching. Based on the comments of the panel, the items on the instrument were revised. The instrument was further pilot tested at Tennessee Technological University with a sample of 54 students enrolled in teaching methods courses in the fall of 1989. All of the subjects were scheduled to enroll in student teaching in the spring of 1990. Based on this pilot test minor changes were made in the wording of several items on the instrument.

Test Administration and Data Analyses

The directors of student teaching/laboratory experiences at seven of the nine public institutions and three of the larger private institutions in

Tennessee were contacted and ask to participate in the study by administering the PSTI to all student teachers at the beginning of the spring 1990 semester at their institutions. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville was excluded from the study since the institution has effectively eliminated its four-year teacher education program. Tennessee Technological University was excluded from the study since many of the subjects who would be in the study had been a part of the pilot testing of the PSTI. A package of instrument was mailed to each of the student teacher directors who in turn administered the PSTI just prior to students entering student teaching in the spring of 1990. The completed instruments were returned to the investigators via the U. S. Mail. Even though there are 39 institutions in Tennessee authorized to offer teacher education programs, the institutions that participated in this study plus the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Tennessee Technological University confer over 80 percent of the degrees leading to initial licensure as a teacher.

Descriptive statistics and the split-half reliability of the PSTI were computed. Also, the structure of the instrument was studied through the use of factor analysis. Comparisons were made between the responses of traditional and nontraditional students, by gender, and status, by type institution (i.e., private versus public).

Results

The results section was divided into two parts corresponding with the major activities of the study, i.e., instrument development and field testing, and a comparative study of the attitudes toward preparedness for student teaching.

Instrument Development and Field Testing

The ten institutions returned 644 completed instruments. Of this number 629 instruments were usable (576, 91.6 percent from public institutions and 53, 8.4 percent from private institutions). Table 1 shows a summary of the demographic information for the subjects who completed the questionnaires. Student were classified as nontraditional if they were over the chronological age of 23 at the time of completing the PSTI. There were no differences across institutions in the proportion of traditional and nontraditional students, males and females, and single and married students. The respondents were asked to indicate the primary area in which they would be doing their student teaching. Also half (320, 49.7%) indicated they would do their student teaching in the elementary grades, 166 (25.8%) at the secondary level, and 158 (24.5%) in such areas as special education, music education, art education, health and physical education, or one of the vocational subjects. The group of subjects as a whole appeared to be typical of students enrolled in their senior year in teacher education in Tennessee.

The split-half reliability of the PSTI, utilizing the Spearman-Brown formula (Garrett, 1964, p. 339) was found to be 0.92. This indicated a high degree of equivalence between the odd and even items of the instrument. Factor analysis was applied to the raw data set utilizing SAS (1985).

Table 1

Number of Subjects by Category (N_t=629)

Type Student	Gender	Martial Status
Traditional 254 40.4%	Male 116 18.4%	Single 368 58.5%
Nontraditional 375 59.6%	Female 513 81.6%	Married 261 41.5%

The PSTI contained 21 statements about each respondent's perceptions of preparedness for student teaching. The topics were divided into eight major areas as follows: (1) college preparation for student teaching experience, (2) knowledge of subject(s), (3) management/communication skills, (4) organization skills, (5) communication skills, (6) previous field experiences/practicums, (7) instructional ability, and (8) overall assessment of preparedness. Results of the factor analysis indicated the instrument was measuring only one factor. Application of various techniques failed to extract other factors.

Attitudes Toward Preparedness

Table 2 shows each question and the percent of respondents indicating their degree of agreement with each statement. Also shown are the mean ratings and standard deviations, on a five point scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree), for each item. Chi-square analysis of the data from each questions were computed for various groups, i.e., males and females, public and private institutions, and traditional and nontraditional groups. Basically there were no differences between the various groups on each of the items. These data have been omitted for simplicity in reporting.

The traditional and nontraditional students did differ on their degree of agreement on three statements. On each of the statements the nontraditional students had a higher percentage of agreeable responses, indicating a more positive attitude toward the items. These items included (Table 2) No. 8, "I feel confident in my ability to discipline the students," No. 15, "I am optimistic about conducting parent-teacher conferences," and No. 20, "I feel I am prepared to student teach." These findings are supported in part by the work of Cohen (1983); Iovacchini, Hall, and Hengstler (1985); and Courage (1984). The nontraditional students appeared to perceive they were better prepared to do student teaching. However, Long (1990) reported that 22 out of 24 failures in student teaching practicum at the University of Montana were nontraditional students. Failure was defined as those individuals who were removed from student teaching prior to completion of the experience, were not allowed to student teach because of poor performance in pre-student teaching experiences, or received a grade of "C" or lower in student teaching.

Table 2

Percent Response, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Each Statement on the PSTI

Statement	Percent					$\bar{X}$	S.D.
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1. I am satisfied with my college preparation for student teaching.	13.5	61.2	15.2	7.9	2.1	2.2	0.9
2. The information acquired in professional education courses will be valuable during my student teaching.	22.1	59.7	10.9	5.4	1.3	2.1	0.8
3. I feel I am very knowledgeable about the subject(s) in which I will student teach.	24.7	54.6	12.5	7.5	0.6	2.0	0.8
4. My classroom management skills are strong.	13.7	50.0	28.0	7.4	0.9	2.3	0.8
5. I will be an efficient organizer in the classroom.	27.1	59.4	13.0	0.4	0.2	1.9	0.6
6. During past field experiences/practicums, I have been relaxed in my role as teacher.	24.0	58.0	10.7	6.3	0.9	2.0	0.8
7. Previous field experiences/practicums have been very positive.	34.4	54.7	7.0	2.5	1.4	1.8	0.8

Table 2 (Continued)

Percent Response, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Each Statement on the PSTI

Statement	Percent					$\bar{X}$	S.D.
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
8. I feel confident in my ability to discipline the students.	18.6	54.6	21.0	5.6	0.2	2.1	0.8
9. I can establish a good rapport with the students I will teach.	42.2	53.4	4.0	0.3	0.0	1.6	0.6
10. I am enthusiastic about student teaching.	54.1	41.7	3.0	0.9	0.3	1.5	0.7
11. My teaching will be stimulating.	35.0	58.0	6.7	0.3	0.0	1.7	0.6
12. I feel confident in meeting the challenges of student teaching.	34.1	55.1	9.4	1.4	0.0	1.8	0.7
13. I will have no difficulty adapting to the school environment.	34.1	55.5	9.1	0.9	0.3	1.8	0.7
14. I can accurately evaluate student progress.	18.1	61.0	19.3	1.5	0.0	2.0	0.7
15. I am optimisitic about conducting parent-teacher conferences.	13.7	56.4	24.0	5.4	0.6	2.2	0.8

Table 2 (Continued)

Percent Response, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Each Statement on the PSTI

Statement	Percent					$\bar{X}$	S.D.
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
16. I can adapt instruction to meet individual needs.	19.9	63.2	16.1	0.6	0.3	2.0	0.7
17. I believe my student teaching experience will be a successful one.	47.6	48.9	3.3	0.2	0.0	1.6	0.6
18. My teaching style will be appropriate for the class(es) in which I will be teaching.	34.9	54.9	9.8	0.4	0.0	1.7	0.6
19. I will have an appropriate rapport with the principal and faculty.	44.1	51.2	4.2	0.2	0.2	1.6	0.6
20. I feel I am prepared to student teach.	29.0	53.4	14.1	2.9	0.6	1.9	0.8
21. I would rather be respected than liked by the students.	42.3	44.0	11.4	2.2	0.0	1.8	0.7

A total score for each subject was computed by summing the individual ratings for each statement. This gave a possible range of attitudinal scores for each subject from 21 to 105 with 63 being the mid-point. The lower the score the more positive the attitude toward that aspect of student teaching. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for various groups.

Table 3 shows a comparison of the means and standard deviations of scores for the traditional and nontraditional groups. Application of the t-test indicated there was no significant difference. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 of no significant difference between the two groups was retained.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test for Total Score for Traditional and Nontraditional Students

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t-value
Traditional	254	40.4	9.1	1.22
Nontraditional	375	39.5	8.4	

Table 4 shows a comparison of the means and standard deviations of scores by gender. Application of the t-test indicated there was no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 of no significant difference was retained.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test for Total Score for Males and Females

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t-value
Males	116	38.1	8.0	0.54
Females	513	40.3	9.0	

Table 5 shows a comparison of the means and standard deviations of scores for those subjects enrolled in public and private institutions. Application of the t-test indicated there was no significant difference. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 of no significant difference between the two groups was retained.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test for Total Score for Public and Private Institutions

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t-value
Public Institutions	576	39.7	8.7	1.88
Private Institutions	53	42.0	8.8	

Conclusions

The results of the study were both conclusive and inconclusive. Although the instrument did not detect differences between groups, it does give another dimension to the evaluation of teacher education programs. The use of instruments such as the one employed in this study can be useful for the formative and summative evaluation of a teacher education program and should be used on a regular basis.

Based on the results of the study it was concluded that there were basically no differences in perceptions of preparedness for student teaching between traditional and nontraditional students, between males and females, and between students at public and private institutions. Each of these points should be further examined at other institutions and in states other than Tennessee.

It appeared the results further warranted the replication of the study with other groups of students at other institutions. Work such as that described in this paper can help improve teacher education programs.

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